Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837. By M. A. LAIRD. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1972. xiv + 300 pp. $18.75.

Amid the pressures to adapt education in today's India to the needs of the new nation, a study like Laird's offers a welcome opportunity for perspective. By implication this carefully researched narrative of missionaries and educational beginnings in Bengal—including Calcutta—in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reveals something about the situation also in our own time.

Based on the author's London University dissertation (1968), Laird's account has the merit of relating developments in England and Scotland to those in India, and thus of providing us with valuable synoptic insights into the interplay of religion—Christianity and Hinduism—and education. We learn how Protestant missionaries from England and Scotland, including the famed Alexander Duff, plus some German (mainly Lutherans) in Church Missionary Society employ, act upon the conviction held by their supporting societies that Western education under the leading of God is a *preparatio evangelica* for an eventual conversion of the "Hindoos."

Seen in retrospect, the approach was inclusive. In contrast to Indian schools encouraged by the British Government the mission schools in this period had a broader curriculum, developed Bengali as a vehicle for Western learning, prepared and published textbooks, promoted elementary education in the vernacular, undertook experimentation, fostered intercultural exchange between India and Britain in educational methods and provided educators of usually high quality. Weakest was the mission schools' teacher training program and the development of Bengali leadership in education. Yet in those decades—marked by the Napolenic era and by Britain's advancement of empire—there stirred in India's middle classes a strong incentive to learn English and to be occupationally on the rise.

Were one to fault Laird's work, it would be largely on what is omitted or, positively, on what is needed to complete the perspective. This specialized topic, in my opinion, requires more frequent and fuller references to its context. The accent falls on education in Britain and India as well as on religion, but informative asides on political, economic or social aspects of the larger scene would give strength to the main subject. This would include, for example, a clearer picture of the British East India Company's policy against missionaries; the role of Danish Serampore (adjacent to Calcutta) in providing a crucially important start for British missionaries in education; the role of German missionary-teachers on the Church Missionary Society staff as evidence of an international Protestantism in a preecumenical era and so forth.

Finally, although the event occurred one year after the terminal date of Laird's treatment, would not the interplay between government-sponsored and missionary schools as it led to the inauguration of a national system of education (1838) have deserved more notice? The activities of Thomas Babington Macaulay (see John Clive's recent biography, New York: Knopf, 1973), compressed into the years 1834 to 1838, gave anglicists the favored position and helped to set the course of Indian education for generations. Would this have wrapped up Laird's account better than does its present abrupt ending?

In any case, Laird has rendered a timely service. He encourages further research in a subject integral to a new intercontinental and globally-aware history as well as to the work of the churches on six continents.

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